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We make the path by walking: performative pedagogy in a recovery high school

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We make the path by walking:
performative pedagogy in a recovery high school

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Dedication

… for those who toil in difficult inner landscapes,
as well as for those who toil in and for the world.

—Clarissa Pinkola Estés, Ph.D

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Abstract

We make the path by walking: performative pedagogy in a recovery high school

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Recovery high schools started emerging in the United States as a continuing source of care for young people in recovery from substance use at the height of the war on drugs in the 1980s. Research shows that recovery from addiction is not only a restoration of healthy social networks but also a reconnection to the physical body. This MFA thesis tracks a process of embodied performance (drama-based activities) to explore critical moments on the recovery journey. Through qualitative research methods of thematic analysis and a thematic coding process, the author examines how an embodied performative pedagogy can support conditions for belonging among youth in a recovery high school, as well as how multimodal semiotic symbol systems and meaning-making provide possibilities for youth to affect how they name the world. The document concludes with a discussion of the research findings, the limitations of the research, as well as recommendations for applied drama/theatre programs in recovery high schools.

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Chapter One

I first discovered that my body was alive with a universe of sensation in a dance class as a young person. Near the end of one of the classes, my teacher Ms. Bennett directed twelve sixth graders to explore the aliveness of our feet by directing our mind and breath. “Let your entire awareness be in your feet,” she said. “Relax and feel your feet *from the inside.*” She guided us slowly feeling each toe, one by one, from within, then to the ankles and extending out through the heels. My feet pulsed and tingled, there was a pressure and heat, an aliveness. The quality of this experience evoked a deep reverence and regard for my body, an attentiveness and respect for the other bodies in the room. I wondered what else I had never noticed. In the book *my body, the buddhist* American choreographer Deborah Hay writes intimately about looking and seeing, and the ways in which the body is the center of our aesthetic knowledge of the world. I am not a trained dancer. I am, however, a person deeply committed to exploring the generative and evocative space of corporality and consciousness. When I came to graduate school, I was interested in deepening my regard for somatics, or “the body as perceived from within,” with a theoretical understanding of the body as an aesthetic, cultural and intellectual site of teaching and learning.

I have come to understand the process of designing and researching what would become this MFA thesis as one of the more demanding and revelatory embodied practices of the last three years of my life. Along the way, I lost sight of my north star—my connection to what moved me *from the inside* and I struggled to find my way through

the dank and desolate terrain of reclaiming and redefining myself. I wrote drafts for at least seven projects and two (not including this one) were complete enough to be submitted as research proposals to the Institutional Review Board. The process of writing this thesis paper followed a similar pattern of intensity and sincerity, promising starts and quick changes. The doing and undoing of this paper has led me closer to some kind of personal truth: Learn to make a choice and stick with it. One thing at a time. I have come to understand this state of unsettledness as connected to a very fundamental fear of being seen—a fear of being fully human. This fear had become an expected response, a well-worn groove in my prefrontal cortex. This paper is an attempt to embody and reclaim some of my truth by walking closer to the middle of my experience, and out back again.

As part of my MFA practicum, I had the opportunity to design and facilitate an applied drama/theatre project with young people at a recovery high school. In this reflective practitioner research paper, I ask these central questions: *What is the experience of youth participants in an applied drama and theatre project? How does/could an applied drama/theatre process integrate individual and/or collective meaning-making in and through the body?* Through the process of engaging in a practice-based research to write and complete this MFA thesis, I came to understand that in order to make sense of the youth participants' journey, I had to first come to terms with my own. I needed to lay bare and claim my own journey as an applied drama/theatre practitioner before I could try to make-meaning of others'. This led me to ask: *What can be learned by engaging with a reflective practice in an applied drama/theatre project?*

PROJECT OVERVIEW

In the Fall of 2018, I designed, facilitated, and researched an applied drama/theatre project with youth participants at Central High School[1], an independent non-profit recovery high school in Texas. Central High is one of forty recovery high schools in the United States. During this project I designed and facilitated nine, one-hour workshops with twenty-four youth participants in recovery from substance use. During our time together, the youth workshop participants co-created cultural artifacts which they interpreted with the intention of moving towards a public performance. I collected data over the nine workshop hours including participant-generated artifacts and visual materials from the workshops, my own reflective practitioner journal entries, observational field notes, and a total of five fifteen-minute semi-structured interviews with youth participants after the project was completed. On average, thirteen participants were present each workshop. Three out of the twenty-four participants were present for all nine workshops.

In the article "The recovery school movement: It's history and future," William White and Dr. Andrew Finch, co-founder of the Association of Recovery Schools, note that recovery high schools, also known as "sober schools," "dry highs," and "sobriety high schools," started emerging in the United States as a continuing source of care for young people in the 1980s (54-58). According to Dr. Finch, recovery high schools are intended to be "all-encompassing programs," serving both therapeutic continuing care

[1] The names of the school and participants are pseudonyms. Names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

and academic goals where students are committed to abstaining from substance use and to working a program of recovery from alcohol and other drugs. Finch notes that recovery high schools have become a growing part of the movement to support recovery-oriented models of care for young people. Most, though not all, are based in the twelve-step model of recovery from addiction (30-31).

A big challenge recovery schools face is the operational cost. Professor of Addiction, Recovery and Substance Use Services at the University of Texas at Austin's Steve Hicks School of Social Work Dr. Lori Holleran Steiker explains, "because many recovery high school students have co-existing disorders (both substance use and mental health) they require extensive academic and emotional support, resulting in a low student to teacher ratio" (2). To this end, recovery high schools come with a substantial financial cost to young people and their families. According to an article published by Pew Trusts, the majority of recovery high schools are public charter or independent alternative schools, and on average cost per student ranges from $16,000 to $18,000 per year (Wiltz web). Central High School, the site of my project-based research, is a tuition-free, public charter high school. Program fees are $1,800 per month (Fieldnotes, 20 July 2018). As research in the field continues to unfold, my deep hope is that recovery high schools can and do become more inclusive and accessible to young people across socioeconomic lines who seek recovery from substance use.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Teenage Brain

It is a challenge for anyone to get and stay sober from drugs and alcohol. Research shows it is even more challenging for young people. According to Dr. Jay Giedd, an adolescent brain expert, one big risk factor for addiction in youth is related to youth brain development. Teenage brains are particularly plastic, meaning they are changeable, and most vulnerable to "risky behavior" and susceptible to addiction (3). As brains are developing in teenage years, research shows there is a "mismatch" between the maturation of the limbic system (the part of the brain that drives emotions) and the prefrontal cortex (the part of the brain that controls impulses). The bottom line is, the younger an individual begins using a substance, the higher the chance the substance use will progress into a substance use disorder and addiction.

Defining Terms

It is helpful to think of alcohol and drug use along a continuum. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), levels of use are generally identified as *use*, *abuse,* and *dependence/addiction*; not everyone who uses substances abuses or is dependent on them. In this paper, I intentionally use the terms "substance use disorder," "addiction," and "recovery from addiction" in reference to the project as this is the language used by the research site and is consistent with recovery high schools across the United States. Additionally, I draw from the National Institute on Drug Abuse who offer this working definition of recovery: "a dynamic process of change

through which people improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential" (web). It is important to note that one definition of "recovery" is not sufficient. Recovery from addiction is not a one-size-fits-all program and means different things to different people; there are many pathways and styles.

Isolation, Mental Health, and Addiction

There is a growing body of evidence to suggest correlations between youth isolation, mental health, and addiction. According to addiction researchers Cornwell and Waite, "social isolation seems to have neurological effects that increase the likelihood of addiction" (web). This suggests that social isolation is a risk factor for addiction in some individuals. Furthermore, it is largely understood in the field of addiction and recovery that addiction is socially isolating. In *Loosening the Grip: A Handbook of Alcoholic Information,* Jean Kinney and Gwen Leaton write, "the addicted individual's relationship with the substance becomes primary and, with continued use, affects the person's psychological adjustment, economic functioning, and social and family relationships." As dependency on the substance progresses, this leads to isolation because "the primary relationship is with a substance not with other people" (89-90). Shame, denial, and other distortions in thinking can further isolate the individual from others and themselves. Within the field of addiction and recovery there seems to be an understanding that a kind of splitting off, or disassociation, between mind and body occur during active addiction. Psychologist Tara Brach notes, "Addiction is a cutting off within our own body, a cutting off of Self. That is the pain. The pain of separation" (web). This suggests that recovery

from addiction is not only a restoration of healthy social networks but also a reconnection to the physical body.

Peer Support

The prevailing view in youth addiction and recovery literature suggests that social relationships and "peer pressure" can be influential factors in the onset of substance use in young people. Interestingly, "peer pressure" is also a contributing positive and enduring indicator of youth recovery. Although research is limited, evidence suggests care models that include peer support are critical to a young person's recovery. Youth-oriented recovery care models, such as the Alternative Peer Group (APG) model, "utilize(s) the social influence of peers" and according to Crystal Collier, a youth recovery advocate, APG models are grounded in the basic assumption that "peer relationships, much like the ones that initiate and support drug and alcohol use, are necessary to facilitate recovery." Notably, the APG model includes "youth staff members who shape sober norms by facilitating peer-led groups and activities" (42-44).

Popular amongst recovery high schools across the United States are twelve-step programs[2] such as Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A) which are based on peer-to-peer support. Twelve-step programs, or "fellowships," are guided by a set of steps and

[2] In this paper, I refer to the twelve-step model specifically because it is model used by the site of my research. It is important to note that the A.A program, steps, and principles, was founded in the 1930's by white, able-bodied, middle-class Protestant men. This raises questions about the inclusivity of twelve-step programs, who they serve and how they function today, and if the "fellowships" are spaces and places where folx with different identity markers experiencing addiction and compulsive behaviors feel welcome, safe, and seen. Addiction and the desire for recovery from addiction, is not bound by race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, or anything else. Regardless of the model, however, the bottom line is addiction is not formed in a vacuum and recovery happens in/with/through community.

principles that outline a course of action for recovery from addiction and other compulsive behaviors. The program structure is symbolically represented in three dimensions: the physical, the mental, and the spiritual, and meetings consist of "fellows" sharing their experience, strength, and hope.

Youth Recovery-Oriented Care Guidelines

Addiction and recovery literature shows there is still much to learn about recovery-oriented care models for youth. Research suggests that current treatment methods for youth are based on modified adult models. In *Adolescent recovery: What we need to know. Student Assistance Journal*, William White and Susan Godley write:

> There is general agreement among adolescents who have resolved alcohol or other drug problems and those who have assisted in that process that recovery is more than the removal or radical deceleration of alcohol and drug use from an otherwise unchanged life. Adolescent alcohol and other drug problems are often closely bundled with other personal or family problems. Recovery connotes the broader resolution of these problems and the movement toward greater physical, emotional, and relational health. Recovery also frequently involves improved educational and vocational performance, the formulation of and movement toward life goals, and acts of service to the community. (1)

White and Godley's work suggests conceptual models of recovery for youth must be holistic in approach, addressing physical, social and emotional well-being, educational counseling, and connecting the young person to community services and opportunities. In response to the growing need to design and develop comprehensive recovery-oriented youth models, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) suggests the following guiding principles of recovery as a model for those

working with and on behalf of youth with substance use and co-occurring mental health disorders. Recovery-oriented care models for youth should be:

- **Culturally relevant:** Culture and cultural background in all of its diverse representations—including values, traditions, and beliefs—are keys in determining a person's journey and unique pathway to recovery. Services should be culturally grounded, attuned, sensitive, congruent, and competent, as well as personalized to meet each individual's unique needs.
- **Address trauma:** Services and supports should be trauma-informed to foster safety (physical and emotional) and trust, as well as promote choice, empowerment, and collaboration.
- **Individualized and person-centered:** Recovery must be self-directed with each individual defining his/her own life goals.
- **Non-linear:** There are multiple pathways to recovery based on an individual's unique strengths and resiliencies. The nature of recovery is non-linear. Recovery is based on continual growth, occasional setbacks, and learning from experience.
- **Empowering:** Individuals have the ability to effectively speak for themselves about their needs, wants, desires, and aspirations.
- **Holistic:** It focuses on total wellness and encompasses an individual's whole life, including mind, body, spirit, and community.
- **Strengths-based:** Recovery focuses on valuing and building on the multiple capacities, resiliencies, talents, coping abilities, and inherent worth of individuals.
- **Peer support**: Mutual support including the sharing of experiential knowledge, skills, and social learning plays an invaluable role in recovery. For youth engaged in social learning through technology, employing new media is fundamental to building resiliency and recovery.
- **Respect**: Respect ensures the inclusion and full participation of individuals in all aspects of their lives.
- **Responsibility**: Individuals must take personal responsibility for their own self-care and journeys of recovery. Individuals must demonstrate courage and must strive to understand their experiences and identify coping strategies and healing processes to promote their own wellness. There is a need to better define and refine the concept of "responsibility" for youth.
- **Hope:** Hope is the catalyst of the recovery process. Recovery provides the essential and motivating message of a better future. People can and do overcome the barriers and obstacles that confront them. Hope must be internalized, but it can be fostered by peers, families, friends, and providers. ("Designing" 18-19)

Drama-based work engages the whole person and is a holistic approach to teaching and learning—the mind, body, and spirit aspects are supported by youth recovery

literature and align with guidelines of a recovery-oriented care model. My intention with this project-based research was to support youth recovery efforts through the use of drama-based work.

RESEARCH MODES AND METHODS

Applied Drama and Theatre

Applied Drama and Theatre (ADT), is a relatively new field within theatre studies. As such, it invites debate between and *betwixt* practitioners and researchers. Broadly speaking, ADT describes a range of theatre and drama practices that happen outside conventional mainstream theatres, and largely in non-theatre settings. According to applied theatre scholar Helen Nicholson, the field is generally divided into two main areas: educational and community contexts (*Applied Drama* 2) and often recognized as:

> Performance practices that have the potential to disrupt fixed polarities between art and instrumentalism, education and entertainment, populism and elitism, process and product, activity and passivity, participation and spectatorship. (Nicholson *Theatre and Education* 80)

ADT is oft characterized by "tensions," "possibilities," and "disruptions." While Jonothan Neelands notes that there seems to be a "consensus around key features of its practises, functions, and political associations" (306), there is debate and discussion within the field concerning language (including how to call the field itself), intention, and general variance of thought on aesthetics, assessment, ethics, and engagement which are shaped and informed by the scholar-researcher-practitioners training, positionality and background. According to Philip Taylor, an Australian ADT practitioner, the intentions

of ADT are focused on these five areas: 1. activism/politics, 2. posing alternatives, 3. working with healing, 4. challenging contemporary discourses, and 5. presenting voices from the viewpoints of the silent and marginalized (*Applied Theatre*). To that end, the voices of historically underrepresented and marginalized communities—people who identify as LGBTQIA, people of color, persons with disabilities, people who are experiencing homelessness, people who are incarcerated, people with disabilities, people in the military and undocumented people—communities in which ADT practitioners work with and alongside are largely missing from the canon. The field's history is founded on theories largely from white practitioners from the global north.

One debate that has had significant airplay is whether or not ADT is in the business of "transporting" or "transforming" participants through the practice of drama. Taylor describes ADT as a "transformative" practice with the tools to "facilitate wide-awakeness in participants" (*Applied Theatre* 8) "... for the purpose of transforming or changing human behavior" (2). I find the language of "transformation" in relation to ADT misguided. Nicholson offers instead performance study scholar Richard Schechner's term "transportation" as a possibility of ADT practice. Nicholson notes that "transportation" within the practice of drama as "...less fixed—performers are 'taken somewhere,' actors are even temporarily transformed, but they are returned more or less to their starting places at the end of the drama or performance" (12). Nicholson maintains:

> Although I recognize the power of theatre-making to touch people's lives, I remain rather uneasy about using the term "transformation" to describe the process of change afforded by practising drama. This is partly because I feel

> uncomfortable about making such grand claims for the effects and effectiveness of my own work as a practitioner, but also because it raises bigger political questions … is this something which is done *to* the participants, *with* them, or *by* them? (*Applied Drama* 15)

Nicholson notes the process of "transportation" is not fixed rather, evokes a possibility and process of "becoming" which is a continual, gradual, and ongoing act. ADT practices invite possibility for artistic encounters that encourage participants to reflect on their beliefs and values as well as their larger connection to their communities and society. ADT practices are varied, process-based, human-oriented, and often focused on social and/or political change.

In this research-based project, I employ a range of drama-based exercises as an applied drama/theatre approach to engage youth participants to think critically about and creatively explore values, themes, and problem situations most relevant to them. We explore devised theatrical forms as one method for "discovering, defining, developing, and delivering"[3] a public sharing. Devised theatre, as a theatrical form, aims to deconstruct the power dynamics between ensemble members, and allows for many people to enter into the act of creation together. It favors participants' lived experience, participation, and collaboration. In the most general sense, Mia Perry writes, "… devised theatre can be described as the creation of original work" (65). The form and content of a devised performance is decided upon by the ensemble. My hope was that the experience

[3] This four-part process, coined the "Double Diamond," is a holistic and iterative design process model that values the divergent and convergent thinking within creative processes. In *Digital Storytelling, Applied Theatre, and Youth* Megan Alrutz notes the process' attention to deliberation and analysis within a creative process is a move towards "valuing the creative development process" (75) with and for young people.

of creating original performance work within an ensemble, would support individuals on their journeys in recovery on both symbolic and expressive levels.

Multimodal Meaning-Making

Educators Kathryn Dawson and Bridget Lee assert, "multimodal meaning making acknowledges that individuals communicate through the spoken and written word as well as through the interactions with their environment, including drawings or visual images, gestures, facial expressions, and bodies" (25). Meaning is always being made, but not necessarily through verbal language and meaning includes both the action and artifacts we use to make meaning— a gesture, a stance, a pen and paper. A multimodal perspective to teaching and learning urges educators to consider all semiotic modes and challenges us to move beyond written and verbal forms of communication. As we engage with new ways of making-meaning which include the body, we invite the possibility of new ways of seeing/knowing. This practice-based research project particularly explored what might be learned by opening up meaning-making frames to include "visual images, gestures, facial expressions, and bodies" in a recovery context.

Embodiment as Performance and Pedagogy

Embodiment can broadly be understood as the relationship between bodies and spaces. French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty maintains that the body is not "merely an object in the world," rather "it is our point of view in the world" (5). Mia Perry and Carmen Medina expand on Merleau-Ponty's work, noting "the experiential

body is both a representation of self (a "text") as well as a mode of creation in progress (a "tool") (63). Feminist and queer theorists also consider the ways that "bodies inhabit spaces with others" (Ahmed 544) and posit that to be socially, historically, and culturally situated or "oriented" is to be in relation to/with other bodies. The body is living, marked, active, and engaged in ongoing conversations. It has long been recognized that drama is an embodied social practice and as Nicholson notes, "[it] draws attention to the ways in which people support each other and take responsibility for other people and the environment as well as for themselves" (*Applied Drama* 35). Our bodies inform how we make sense of the past, engage with the present moment, and imagine the future. Rather than becoming a "fixed history," Nicholson reminds us, storytelling through embodied performance, "invites a new way of thinking about the body in space and time" (105).

In this practice-based research project, I aimed to bring a practice of *performative embodiment*, through drama-based activities and devised theatre processes, into a recovery high school. My goal was to center and privilege the body as a site of "performative pedagogy" defined by performance studies scholar and educator John Warren as "an approach to education that moves meaning to the body, asking students to engage in meaning-making through their own living and experiencing bodies" (95). Performance studies scholar Elyse Lamm Pineau offers this definition of performative pedagogy:

> … it is more than a philosophical orientation or a set of classroom practices. It is a location, a way of situating one's self in relation to students, to colleagues, and to the institutional policies and traditions under which we all labor. Performance studies scholars and practitioners locate themselves as embodied researchers:

> listening, observing, reflecting, theorizing, interpreting, and representing human communication through the medium of their own and other's experiencing their bodies. (130)

Performance pedagogy is an engaged pedagogy where teaching and learning are imbued with a sense of constant becoming. Incorporating the body as a site of pedagogy and meaning-making works to acknowledge the complex interlocking factors and intersectional identities both teachers and learners bring to an educational space. Author, professor and social activist bell hooks expands upon Warren and Pineau's ideas by emphasizing that "it is impossible to enter any educational space without our bodies, yet continually we render our bodies functionally absent—as a site erased to focus on the cognitive, the mind" (191). hooks suggests performative pedagogy, "an engaged pedagogy that understands teachers and learners as whole human beings" (5), as a step away from an epistemological framework that positions the brain/mind as the sole entity that has meaning or importance in learning. I wondered if centering the body as one site of meaning-making could invite participant to engage their bodies, as Warren suggests, "in a more full and powerful way" (95), and thus, make space for new ways of seeing/knowing to be constructed, contested, and explored. I employed a performative pedagogical framework to guide the activities created for this applied theatre project.

Researcher Positionality and Role

In this research I situate myself as a graduate student, applied drama/theatre teaching artist, and researcher. I am white, able-bodied, neurotypical, middle class, and identify as a cis gender female. My approach to teaching and learning is grounded in the

social constructivists believe that knowledge is constructed through interaction with others. I follow a lineage of participant-centered pedagogy and theatre-making influenced by Brazilian writers, activists and educators Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal. Drawing inspiration from Black feminist scholars and queer pedagogues such as bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Toni Cade Bambara, Gloria Anzaldúa, adrienne maree brown, and Sara Ahmed, my work is grounded in a vision of radical healing, rooted in self-determinism and collective liberation. My point of entry into working with a community in recovery comes from my own family history and lived experience. Over the years I have joined thousands of other people in recovery in the task of re-storying our lives, reinterpreting ourselves in a more positive and self-affirming way. In my experience, telling one's story of personal experience is a step towards reclaiming power. Furthermore, I have found that engagement with the body as a site of knowing and meaning-making has been as critical and profound to my life and healing as anything else.

I see my ongoing work as a practitioner, researcher, and human being on this planet is to uncover the layers of privilege that allow me to navigate systems including initiating a project and research in a community not my own. As a person working with non-professional collaborators across different cultural and artistic practices, I have long wrestled with the politics of my practice. I came to graduate school to disentangle, explore, expand, challenge, and understand myself more fully through theory and practice. I endeavor to be reflexive and acknowledge that this research offers a partial view of how addiction and recovery from addiction may be conceptualized in an applied

drama/theatre project. I feel strongly that applied drama/theatre praxis has distinct ethical and political implications and that there is no neutral position in the work. To that end, I advocate for a reflective/reflexive practice, as one (not the only) way of supporting myself and applied drama/theatre practitioners in analyzing our perceptions and actions as a way to reduce the risk of practicing in ways that reproduce oppressive and harmful practices.

APPLIED THEATRE RESEARCH AND THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Applied theatre scholar and practitioner Lynn Dalrymple asserts that the goal of applied theatre research is to "provide a unique experience or another way of knowing and understanding the world that cannot be measured using tools drawn from the social or physical sciences" (201). Whereas the social sciences might orient towards deficit-based research methodologies, ADT as practice-as-research is human-centered, asset-based and built upon the expertise and lived experiences participants bring to the work. In *Applied theatre in action: a journey,* Jennifer Harley reflects the tension between practice and research in the field, maintaining, "we need to see the connecting paths and move between them constantly, finding a way around the obstacles… It is crucial to remember everything connects" (148). Harley and others emphasize a kind of *inter-connects* that must be balanced between the "'swampy lowland' where situations are confusing 'messes' incapable of technical solutions" and the "'high, hard ground'[4] where

[4] Hughes, Kidd, and McNamara draw on the work and 'swampy lowland'/'high, hard ground' language of Donald Schön, suggesting the usefulness of a reflective practitioner method in the practice of applied theatre research.

practitioners can make effective use of research-based theory and technique" (Hughes, Kidd, and McNamara 186). Hughes, Kidd and McNamara write, "The practice of applied theatre is itself defined as a *reflexive* knowledge-making practice that works to materialise, investigate, and remake social experience, narratives, histories, and contexts" (191 *italics mine*). As a reflexive knowledge making practice, the reflexive practitioner reflects on the *why* and the *how* of their work. These questions and emergent understandings fuel a cyclical and iterative process of praxis, or reflection on action.

In *The Reflexive Teaching Artist* Kathryn Dawson and Daniel Kellin describe praxis as "an ongoing, reiterative cycle of reflection and action that moves the individual toward a new critical awareness. It is about what one does; but also, why one does it, and how choices reference and impact larger systems of power and the people/policies/structures within them" (215). It is through praxis that we make meaning of our lived experience, refine our action, and try again. Within the constructs of an applied drama/theatre project with youth participants at a recovery high school I aim to move towards greater understanding about myself, the youth participants, and our shared experience. In the process of writing this paper, I came to understand that I needed to reflect on my process in the move towards becoming reflexive. I needed to move through a process of making and unmaking myself to lay bare the values that shape my practice.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

In this paper, I will share my experience in an applied drama/theatre project with youth participants at a recovery high school. I began the project interested in engaging

youth participants through drama-based work as a site of possibility and embodied meaning-making. I planned the applied drama/theatre project and structured it in such a way that would allow many participants to enter into a process of creating and reflecting on our work together.

In this introductory chapter, I outlined my research questions, provided an overview of the applied drama/theatre project, and described the background and significance for this research study. I illustrated that isolation is a characteristic of addiction and the need for peer support and the reconnection to the body in an individual's journey of recovery. I defined applied drama/theatre, multimodal meaning-making, and performative embodiment, which I see as a guiding framework for my work. In the process of writing this paper, I came to realize that in order to make-meaning of the youth participants' experience in this project, I first needed to turn the lens onto myself, thus, I make the choice to analyze my work first.

In Chapter Two, I will examine my own practice as a reflective practitioner. I begin by providing an overview of the project, including our move towards a public sharing and the outcome of that effort. Throughout, I reflect on my discoveries as a reflective applied drama/theatre practitioner working with youth participants.

In Chapter Three, I focus on data I collected from the youth participants. I will share how I collected and analyzed the semi-structured interview data with youth participants and explore three key moments from the applied drama/theatre project that illustrate a journey of recovery. Throughout, I consider how embodied performance

makes space for multiple ways of knowing and meaning-making within a performative frame.

In Chapter Four, my final chapter, I return to my research questions and summarize my findings. I then look at the limitations of the study, which include the number of participant interviews and other research and practice variabilities. I follow this with recommendations for the field and closing thoughts.

Chapter Two

We make the road by walking.[5]

—Paulo Freire

The process of writing this paper has been a true journey for me, filled with the usual ups and downs of writing, but also a kind of "bleary-eye searching" (*Applied Theatre* Thompson 25) and real emotional warfare. I found that many old understandings about myself had to be disrupted to write; and, where my customary props no longer existed, lay a bare and spacious landscape. In an effort to locate words for this unsettled state of being, I made many turns in my research process. I have come to make sense of these turns as part of a process of remaking, reorienting, and reclaiming myself as an active agent in my work. In this chapter, I will describe how I reflected on my personal experience in the workshops through an analysis of my observational field notes and reflective practitioner journal entries. During this portion of my paper I also provide an overview of the project. I share how I designed, implemented, and researched an applied drama/theatre project with youth participants. Then, I offer three moments in the workshop that have moved me towards a more nuanced understanding of my practice. The conclusions I draw will support me in taking future actions in my own personal life and professional practice.

[5] The phrase "we make the road by walking" is an adaptation of a proverb by the Spanish poet Antonio Machado, which reads "se hace camino al andar," or "you make the way as you go."

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In this paper I draw on Philip Taylor's model of reflective practitioner as a methodological approach to my data collection and meaning-making. According to Taylor, "reflective practitioners use their own instrument, themselves, to raise the questions of inquiry, to process how those questions will be investigated, and to consider how their emergent findings will impact upon their lifelong work" (*Researching* 40). Taylor notes, "the reflective practitioner stance demands a discovery of self, a recognition of how our interactions with others, and how others read and are read by this interaction." A reflective practitioner, he continues, works to "… interrogate the character of their own truths" (27-28). For this reason, I collected data in this practice-based research project in the form of observational field notes and daily reflective journal entries about my experience and that of the youth participants. In addition to collecting my own field notes and reflective practitioner journal entries, I documented the participants' work. I collected student responses to creative writing activities, photographed students' brainstorming sessions, and art installations. The analysis of the data was an ongoing and iterative process. Following each workshop I created thick descriptions in my reflective practitioner journal and reflected on the events of the day. This ongoing analysis helped me to adjust my plans and be responsive to participants' needs. In this chapter, I will use my journal entries to reflect on my journey as a reflective practitioner. To analyze this data set, I used an abbreviated grounded theory approach, which acknowledges my own subjectivity and positionality as a researcher in the data analysis. Through this portion of

my analysis, I consider the following question: What can be learned by engaging with a reflective practice in an applied drama/theatre project?

PROJECT STRUCTURE

Location and Goals

In April of 2018, I contacted the program coordinator at Students in Recovery (SiR)[6], a campus program that supports university students in recovery from alcohol and other drugs. I was interested in developing a series of performance-based workshops with university students and planned to document this effort using an arts-based research process. When SiR and I met in the Spring, we discussed using drama/theatre processes to address misconceptions and stigmas surrounding addiction and recovery. They were enthusiastic and supportive of the idea, however, concerned that I would not be able to get a consistent group of participants. Since my aim was to simultaneously create a summative performance and conduct a research project, there would be great value of having a captive and committed ensemble. They suggested I look into partnering with Central High School, a local recovery high school. The previous year SiR led visual art classes with students at Central that were highly generative and well-received by the students and adult stakeholders alike. In July, I met with the staff at Central High. Central High School is one of forty recovery high schools in the United States and supports academic and recovery goals tailored to meet the needs of each student. In addition to fulfilling academic requirements for graduation and committing to a program of recovery

[6] The name of the program is a pseudonym. Names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

from substance use, students participate in field trips and weekly enrichment programs, community service, and have access to on-site counselors and twelve-step recovery support. During my first meeting with staff at Central High School I learned that English and Science at the High School were taught by on-site teachers, known as "direct teach," while all other subjects were supported by an online learning platform. I learned that it is not uncommon for students to spend an entire school day (6-8 hours) engaged in learning online. Finally, I learned that students did not have regular access to the arts in their curriculum. Interested in addressing a need for active, creative, and collaborative arts programming, the adult stakeholders and I spoke about the possibilities and challenges of leading a drama/theatre project at Central High School. Similar to SiR, one immediate challenge would be the changing composition of participants. The staff members explained that Central accepts students year-round on a rolling basis and that each student progresses through the curriculum at their own pace. As such, I was told srudents may be "coming and going." Together, the adult stakeholders and I, decided the goals of the project would be "to support youth participants in the process of making art together" (Fieldnotes, 27 July 2018). I was offered the Tuesday one-hour enrichment program time slot and was told I could meet students every two weeks during the Fall for a total of nine workshop hours. I left our initial meeting with some concerns with the logistics of the project, reflected in this journal entry:

> I worry about the "coming and going" and with more time between workshops, there is a higher possibility of a changing ensemble. (Reflective Practitioner Journal, 27 July 2018)

Despite a less than ideal structure for the residency, I forged ahead with planning. I designed a nine session workshop sequence with planned time for a sharing at the end of the residency. I assumed that I could and would adjust the plans as I learned more about the group's values, interests, assets, and needs. I planned to use drama-based work to explore these questions and explore themes that were relevant to the participants' lives. I was unsure if this would lead to a summative sharing at the end. To develop the plan for the residency, I drew initial inspiration from Urban Bush Women's community-engaged process. I have never seen them work, however, I am deeply inspired by their mission, core values, and commitment to community-engaged processes. In the preparatory phase of this project, I looked to the company's fourth value, "Entering Community and Co-Creating Stories," which reads:

> No two communities are alike. Each community is unique and has the answers it seeks to uncover … We are not doing the thinking for a community but helping to facilitate its thinking through listening and bringing to the table what we are hearing. We then interpret what we hear through the use of our artistic medium. ("About UBW")

The task I defined for myself was to stay present with the youth participants and move towards a deeper understanding of the context by offering a palette of participatory art making practices accompanied by opportunities for the artists and I to reflect on the work together. In this project, my aim was first to understand the community values and support themes that were relevant to the participants' lives: *Who were they? What interests did they have? What did they value?* The "Getting to know one another" phase (Workshops 1-3) was focused on developing ensemble and identifying group values.

"Developing a shared language" (Workshops 4-7) was focused on putting the groups ideas and values into action through drama-based work and devised theatre processes. Lastly, the "Sharing and Reflection" (Workshop 8-9) was focused on a summative sharing and reflection on our work together. Each workshop followed the same format: Check-in, Ensemble Building Warm-up, Main Activity with Reflection, Check-out. This information can be seen in Table 1.

Workshop	Main activities	Overarching goals
Getting to know one another		
Workshop 1 Workshop 2 Workshop 3	Story of my name Musical chair poetry Journey mapping	Develop ensemble Identify values and history
Developing a shared language		
Workshop 4 Workshop 5 Workshop 6 Workshop 7	Short devising sequence Obstacle installations Recipe of an event Rehearsal	Put values into action through art making
Sharing and Reflection		
Workshop 8 Workshop 9	Sharing Interviews/Closing	Share, reflect, celebrate

Table 1: Workshop Structure and Learning Design

The Participants

Coming into this residency, I was aware that the Central High youth participants were actively negotiating big changes to their relationship to power and personal agency

in their lives. Over time I met participants in various stages on their journey in recovery from substance use. Some participants had months of sobriety, some weeks, some hours. They all shared a common purpose—to get sober, stay sober, and finish high school (Fieldnotes, 4 Sept. 2018). All had been in a residential or outpatient rehabilitation treatment center prior to enrollment at the recovery high school. Participants shared that they had never participated in theatre nor did they consider themselves artistic.

The Daily Ritual

We began each workshop in a circle with a Check-in, a practice of "care and community building" that acknowledges the "lives we live both in and outside of the space" (Biedrzycki qtd. in Johnston and Brownrigg 75). Check-ins consisted of a quick statement of what kind of energy participants were bringing into the space. I observed participants who were reluctant at first, become more willing to "check-in" over time. After we were all met with the check-in, I would share the agenda which provided an overview of what participants could expect that day. Next, we revisited the list of group agreements. In Workshop 2, the group co-constructed a list of agreements on ways of working together. The group decided that "courage, a willingness to try new things, honesty, and good vibes," along with a willingness from me (as the facilitator) to "give second chances" would be a good place to start (Fieldnotes, 15 Sept. 2018).

At the beginning of each workshop I would ask if anyone wanted clarification on an agreement, make an amend, or add a new one. Then we would collectively agree to honor the agreements by showing a "thumbs up." Within our time together, there were no

clarifications sought or additions made to the list of group agreements. The practice of returning to our agreements and allowing space for amendments to be made was a commitment to building an equitable space where participants could voice their needs, desires, and values. Both the agenda and group agreements were taped to the wall on large butcher paper every workshop. We would follow this with an ensemble-building warm-up game intended to build skills of rhythm, listening, and unconditional support. The games were a step towards developing ensemble and to introduce participants to the idea that our work would be active, participatory, and fun. Theatre makers Chloe Johnston and Coya Paz Brownrigg note, "games put participants in relationship with one another and begin the crucial work of turning a group of people into an ensemble" (xvii). The rules of the games encouraged youth participants to decide how to act and express themselves and set the tone that embraced concentration and the relative chaos of community. The games and techniques established a collective goal that paradoxically offered rules and creative freedom (Boal). The main activities for each workshop were organized around overarching themes related to recovery and engaged participants in multimodal ways of creative expression and personal reflection. Each workshop ended with "It Made Me Think"[7]—a closing ritual asking participants to reflect on the day's work in one word or short phase. Responses often included reflections on sleepiness, boredom, gratitude, or memorable moments shared during the workshop. In the next section, I will focus my reporting for this thesis on three experiences that caused me to question my beliefs about my practice, process, and values. Then, I will analyze and

[7] [Source: Megan Alrutz, Drama-Based Instruction Network]

discuss how the experiences have impacted my current beliefs. Lastly, I will relate to how I will apply the lessons as new thinking about my practice.

RISK, TRUST, AND INTIMACY

In Workshop 2, I chose to facilitate "Musical chair poetry"[8] an exercise with stated goals "to create group poems, collaborate and build the ensemble" (Cohen-Cruz 131). As the name suggests, anytime music plays participants move around the circle. Anytime the music stops, participants write a line for a poem on a slip of paper. As the activity goes, the poems grow. The idea is to create a cohesive poem, following the theme, style, and content as the previous poet. I observed participants dancing, laughing, and visibly engaging in the writing.

After several rounds of dancing and writing, we sat in a circle to read aloud our collective poems and together, reflect on emerging themes, ideas, and bits of text or story that we might want to explore together in subsequent workshops. Participants shared poems about summer vacation and family, odes to pizza and boredom. Towards the end of the activity, one participant shared a line of text that was particularly upsetting to her. The text was read aloud and the conversation quickly snowballed into a detective game, participants trying to solve who wrote what. "I don't know if you are a therapist or what, but we need to talk about what this person wrote," one participant said (Fieldnotes, 14 Sept. 2018). I reminded the group that I was not a therapist. I hoped at this point the adult staff member in the room would step in. The backup support did not come. I had hoped

[8] [Source: Dana Edell, "ViBe Exercises"]

this activity would bring the group together. This was not going as I had expected. I looked at the clock, we had seven minutes remaining in the workshop. I decided to close the workshop by asking participants to name one act of care they could do for themselves that day— the responses included being with a loved pet, eating a good dinner, and hanging out with a friend. I stayed after the workshop to process what had happened with the staff member. That night I wrote in my journal:

> They [the staff member] did not seem to be upset by what happened in the room at all and said that I handled it well. I am seriously questioning my competency as a facilitator and learning designer. Everything seemed to be going well, until it wasn't. To make it worse, I didn't ask for the support I needed—neither in the moment nor after the workshop. I wonder what that was all about. I checked in with the staff later this afternoon and they said the students were doing fine. (Reflective Practitioner Journal, 14 Sept. 2018)

Ensuring the youth participants experienced a sense of safety during the workshop was a major concern for me and I felt like, in this workshop, I had missed the mark. I chose the "Musical chair poetry" activity because I was interested in the way it mirrors collaborative processes, one by one, line by line, each person contributes parts to make a whole. I was interested in exploring with the participants the freedom that can come, when as artists and people in recovery, we let go of the oppression of perfectionism. The pace of the activity and the co-construction of text meant that participants could not "overthink" their work rather, offer their spontaneous responses. My hope was this activity would bring some levity to the group while connecting physical movement and written text. The open-endedness of the writing invited choice and creative expression.

On the other hand, the anonymity of the poems invited the possibility of risk as there was no personal accountability to the creation of content.

Applied theatre practitioner and scholar James Thompson writes in *Digging Up Stories*, "giving dramatic structure to painful experiences can deny as much as it reveals. It can enhance the hurt as much as it delivers understanding and forgiveness" (25). I knew working in a group, and being asked to create text together, involved some level of risk. What was my intention? As I reflected on the day, the goal was to "develop ensemble" and to explore the use of written text as one form of creating original performance material with the group. Of the many options available to achieve these intended outcomes, why this activity? I questioned my choice long after this moment. I do not know if my desire to transform a familiar form (musical chairs) into a simple, and lively way to co-create text together overshadowed the reality that to build spaces and places of collaboration takes intentionality and trust.

As an applied drama/theatre artist, I move in spaces and places where trust is developed *through* engagement with the process. Trust is always an exchange and whose giving and receiving can be complex. Building trust is multi-faceted, and requires consistency, reliability, predictability, availability, honesty, and transparency. As an outsider, I simply had not yet built rapport and trust, and I did not have the resources to attend to negotiations of intimacy that emerged, nor, did I have the training to do so. Lastly, reflecting on this moment marked a major shift in thinking about my own vulnerability. I now recognize how I was afraid to ask for the help I needed both prior to the workshop as I designed the sequence and as an ongoing practice with the adult

stakeholders as the project evolved. I did not share my challenges facilitating this work for fear of what it might say about me as a facilitator and artist. I was caught in my own dance of distancing—through avoiding intellectual and emotional intimacy. To be seen in the sometimes messy, often unpolished process of "becoming" (Nicholson 108) requires real courage and an ongoing commitment to unearthing, examining, and healing the ways I perpetuate individualism and white, patriarchal culture. It sounds so obvious and yet this experience revealed to me the ways I constrict, the ways I hold back, and limit the possibility of authentic relating and generating relationships. Breaking old constellations of self takes trust that is built over time, through process, through patience, through a willingness to step outside old paradigms and into new ways of seeing/knowing.

TOWARDS A YOUTH-LED EVENT

In October I began to note, "There are new participants each workshop and the two-week gap in between is a real challenge. Our work feels a bit disjointed and every time we meet, it's like we are meeting for the first time" (Reflective Practitioner Journal, 2 Oct. 2018). My journal entries devote a considerable amount of attention to the changing composition of collaborators and workshop structure. Despite there being little continuity between collaborators or content between workshops, at the beginning of November I made the decision to restructure the final two workshops to support a youth-led sharing with the intention of reflecting on our time together.

In *Feminism and Addiction*, Dr. David Berenson maintains, "the process of recovery from addiction is a process of recovering a … sense of power and will … a shift

from willpower as the control of objects to power-of-will as the creation of possibility or context" (74-75). In other words, power is expressed as an ability to create possibility. Given the possibilities, power is also the ability to make a choice. Whereas addiction gives few choices, I wanted to give youth participants choice in how to shape the project. Theatre artists and scholars Jenny Hughes and Karen Wilson assert, "Young people value the opportunity to invest their skills and imagination in the creative process and see their own ideas realized through the development of projects" (63). My aim was to center and valorize the youth participants' desires and lived experiences as "the criterion of meaning" (Collins). I wondered how I might embody the kind of leadership that recognized the participants as knowers, modeling the practice of shared and collaborative leadership and supporting youth as active agents and fellow artists engaged in the ongoing development of the project.

In Workshop 6 and Workshop 7, totaling two hours, participants and I moved towards developing a creative project to share with their larger school community. Through a "Poster Dialogue" (Figure 1) and democratic process of "Dot-ocracy" voting, the artists chose from the range of drama-based options they had experienced during our time together. Fairly quickly, there was consensus on what the artists wanted their community to know about their experience in the workshops. Responding to the prompt: *What do you want the audience to know about your experience? See? Feel? Experience?* participants identified "Acceptance and Patience," "Senioritis," "Creativity" and "Loving" to be paramount to their experience in the workshops and something they wished to share with their school community.

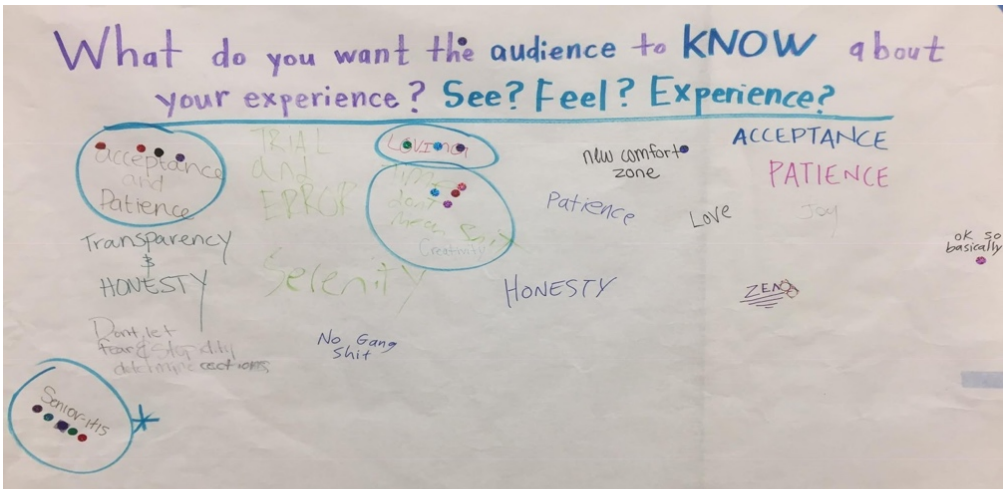


Figure 1: Poster Dialogue

There was palpable concern and uncertainty about creating a sharing: “Will we have to act?” (Field notes, 30 Oct. 2018) was asked. This resulted in an engaged group discussion about different ways we could explore and creatively express themes that were relevant to the group in a way that was safe, fun, and challenged them to step out of their comfort zone (all goals identified by the group). I handed out post-it notes and asked the artists to write big ideas, curiosities, themes, and questions they wanted to explore through the sharing. Unanimously, the artists wanted their work to be recovery related. We explored the questions: *What about recovery? What story do we definitely want (or not want) to tell? What excites us?* We talked about *how* we might share their stories and experience. From this discussion, we agreed the young artists would lead an “experiential” event. The group expressed a desire for their audience to experience “acceptance and patience” along with “senioritis” — a condition felt by many and

described by one participant as “I just want to be done done done (with school)” (Field notes, 30 Oct. 2018). The group decided on the following event structure; they also determined that each activity would be led by one of the young artists:

- Welcome and Names
- Warmup: Guided Meditation
- Main Activity: Walking Labyrinth with Soundscape
- Closing: “It made me think” (Fieldnotes 2 Nov. 2018)

The participants and I met one more time before the scheduled event. During Workshop 7 our tasks were to rehearse with the facilitators, develop audio tracks for the soundscape, create a plan for mixing the audio, design a floor plan for the event, and decide upon event materials and props. I split the room into two stations, the “Design Studio” and the “Sound Studio,” with the intention that artists would choose which station they wanted to work at and could rotate through the stations at any time. In the “Sound Studio” participants created a soundscape using a variety of instruments and audio recorded interviews with their peers. The “Design Studio” created a floor plan and considered how they wanted the event participants to move through the space. I met individually with the young artist facilitators to talk through the sequence they wanted to lead.

Youth-led creative processes are practices of possibility through which, as Dr. Megan Alrutz asserts in *Digital Storytelling, Applied Theatre, and Youth*, “young people see and interpret how their experiences count as knowledge and relate to their sense of belonging in the world” (77). The choice of creative practices emerged from the group

and foregrounded the youth's curiosities and artistic assets. This event employed symbolism through the use of labyrinth as a metaphor for recovery and multimodal meaning-making, including audio, visual, written, and physical sign systems. Kress and Van Leeuwen explain a multimodal approach as "the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined..." (128). When the arts are used in combination, each medium can enhance, and may contribute new meaning to the total experience. Multimodal and embodied performance practices support the recovery-oriented literature around self-direction, supporting individuals to exercise choice and taking agentic steps towards their own autonomy and power ("Designing" 18). As we closed the circle, staff members planned to invite the artists' favorite teachers, family members, and donors to the event. In the meantime, I hustled to find a labyrinth.

On the door to Central High I had noticed a placard with the words "Labyrinth." I asked the youth participants and adult stakeholders about this place and no one knew anything about it. I found the contact information for the director of "Labyrinth" online and immediately emailed them, explaining the event and asking for help. While I waited to hear back, I experimented with making my own labyrinth and pulled in colleagues to work through the nitty gritty details of making one from scratch. I wanted it to be mobile and was excited about the idea that it would stay with the school after the project was done. I attempted to pull together supplies and time with the youth participants to design and construct the walking labyrinth. Ultimately, we were unable to schedule time as a group and my attempts at constructing a walking labyrinth were unsuccessful. Two days

before the event, I heard back from the director of "Labyrinth." I learned that their office shared the same building as Central and they were delighted to support our project by lending their large canvas labyrinth for the event.

STEPPING INTO THE UNKNOWN

On the morning of Workshop 8, the date of the scheduled event, I received a phone call from Central High School's Director of Admissions. She told me that three of the four artist-facilitators were home sick and suggested we cancel the sharing. After the call, I wrote in my journal:

> Participants who have been consistent and visibly engaged throughout the residency are home sick. What is there to learn here? What is the significance? It's not uncommon when young people take their power back that they can feel physically ill. I don't know if that is what's going on. It is an opportunity for me to reach out and invite them back even just if they don't want to lead, they can be in the room with us. How can I show up with love and hold students accountable for the commitment we made with one another? (Reflective Practitioner Journal, 14 Nov. 2018)

Two hours later, I arrived at CHS with an alternative workshop plan. I framed the workshop around the work of recovery as a process that invites us to try new things. I shared with the group that as I reflected on the canceling of the sharing, I was reminded of my own experience in performance spaces and how the theatre as an art form is about relating to change and leaning into the unknown. Our focus of the alternative workshop shifted into "stepping into the unknown." Eight participants were present and together out of twenty-four. During the hour-long session, participants shared stories about when they navigated spaces and places of uncertainty, and moments that required courage and

healthy risk-taking. In small groups, the youth artists worked together to create 3-D sculptures of their challenges, triumphs, and leaps of faith (Fieldnotes, 14 Nov. 2018). That night, I wrote in my reflective practitioner journal:

> I talked with my counselor about what happened today. She emphasized the importance of my response to the situation. Everything I do gives the group a message. With this in mind, she suggested I might consider sending a note to the students, asking if they would like to reschedule the sharing. This is a gesture of communicating to them that I am neither angry nor disappointed rather, interested in calling them back in. (Reflective Journal Entry, 14 Nov. 2018)

I thought about our first day together and the commitment I had made to the participants' to "give second chances." The next day, I sent an email to the admissions coordinator to share with the artists who were out sick, asking if they would like to reschedule the event. I wondered: *What is my role as teaching artist and how do I support young people's artistry*? *What is needed to align purpose and build power together? Did participants not show up because they did not really want to have the event? Was the choice to have a summative sharing a productive one? And if not, what is needed to keep the energy and momentum going to move a program forward?* While we were unable to reschedule a final public event with guests, I did return to the school in early December to co-lead an adapted version of the planned event with the youth participants. After the event, I wrote in my journal:

> Today the young artists were a mix of distracted and disinterested when moving through the planned event. I observed when we moved to 'walking the labyrinth,' the energy spiked as many ran *through* it and one participant took great delight in rolling her body *across* it. Following the event, one participant came up to me and thanked me for working with the group. The participant shared that she looked forward to our workshops and my "patience" really helped on days that she wanted to get high. Still, there was some confusion about my role and the goals of

> the project. One participant told me that he thought I was a therapist the whole time and that I was there to "study them." (Reflective Practitioner Journal, 4 Dec. 2018)

At the end of the workshop series, I was left with more questions than answers about applied theatre practice/research. I was concerned that some participants left this experience thinking they were simply objects in my "study." The tone of the participant's voice indicated that I may have missed something critical in the process of working together. I worried that it wasn't a project they felt like they shared rather, it was something done *to* them. There was a real misunderstanding about the work overall and its relevance to their lives. The final workshop illuminated to me that some participants did not know *what* we were doing, or *why* we were doing it. I continued to wonder*: How can outside artists be allies in foregrounding and supporting community goals, and what does that look like?*

I realize now that this moment marked another significant shift, I swung to the other end of the spectrum quickly moving from working *with* participants towards an event led *by* them which, may have felt for some, a being done *to*. I realize now in my desire to create a collaborative creative space that foregrounded a youth-led process, there were steps I missed to making that so. In a desire to "flatten the hierarchy," I was also making moves on a very fundamental level that did not support youth agency at all. The power I held (and could offer participants) was to engage participants in dialogue, the sharing of ideas, and supporting expression through the sharing of artistic language and skills. Specifically, I questioned whether I had successfully and deliberately brought

in performance skills and language that supported participant discovery and youth artistry. Ultimately, I was attempting to lead participants through a process I was simultaneously navigating myself as an agentic artist.

I recognize that building trust takes time and is a practice we commit to like the steps that we take, one after the other, with the best information we have at the time and with the fullest courage we can muster. I found that building shared knowledge and shared ownership over the process was a challenge. It requires continuity, community buy-in, and an intentional effort on my part to critically examine power, intentionality, vulnerability, and my own subjectivity. Through the process of writing this paper, I witnessed a journey within myself. I wondered: *How does my own subjectivity, biases, and lived experiences shape and inform my understanding of this experience? How does my life support and inform my aesthetic, political, and facilitation choices*? It is a powerful practice to consider the ways my own subjectivity and perception gets in the way of being available to the possibilities that are always unfolding. Reflecting on the choices I made in this project marked a significant shift in owning my value and skill as an artist. I believe there is more room for me to share my artistic and personal perspective. Naming my power through sharing ideas, experience, and expertise is not only an act of generosity it may also be, paradoxically, a way to facilitate participant discovery and inspire generative youth artistry. I came to realize vulnerability is about being able to bring my skills/knowledge in the room and lead.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the project, including our move towards a public sharing and the outcome of that effort. Because of my tendency when thinking about the project and participant experience was to think about the design of the program and my individual capacity to carry it out with integrity, clarity and enthusiasm, it was harder to step outside the belief that I had missed the mark as a facilitator when challenged to make sense of the effectiveness of my teaching and efficacy of the program. I was suspicious of my growing emphasis on "the outcome," "the effect," and "evaluation" of the process/product. As I considered the implications of cancelling the youth-led sharing and the youth participants' responses when I returned in December to co-lead the same sharing, I wondered: *why* measure the processes/product, *for whom* am I measuring the process/product, and *how* am I measuring it? (Dalrymple). Underpinning these questions was an even more elusive one: how do I define a "quality" applied drama/theatre project?

While I recognize assessing the effect of ADT process/product is integral to funding and project integrity, James Thompson warns that measuring effect is, "… limited if it concentrates solely on effects' identifiable social outcomes, messages of impacts and forgets the radical potential of the freedom to enjoy beautiful radiant things" ("Performance of pain" 6). Thompson and others argue for the "end of effect" with a turn towards performance affect. As part of my original planning, I returned to Central High School to conduct interviews with the workshop participants. I wondered: What was the experience of the youth participants? How might they talk about the effect/affect of the

project? In the next chapter, I focus on data I collected from the youth participants and look at three youth identified performative moments that emerged from my data analysis.

Chapter Three

Despite my disappointment about the cancelled performance and what I perceived as the workshop participants' disinterest in the internal event sharing, I began to prepare to return to Central High to conduct post-program interviews. I felt unsettled about the quality of my work and my effectiveness as a facilitator. I had deep concerns about how participants would characterize the experience.

In the article "Drama for change? Prove it! Impact assessment in applied theatre," Michael Etherton and Tim Prentki trouble the notion of intended and unintended impacts in ADT work. They write, "a creative devising process that deals with human relationships is always prone to communicate more or something different than is intended" (147). Suspicious of my emphasis on "the effect" and "outcome" of the project and inspired by the words of Paulo Freire that "knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world and with each other" (72), I was curious what knowledge youth participants generated and what they took away as useful for their own lives and well-being. In this chapter, I will share how I collected and analyzed the semi-structured interview data with youth participants and explore three key moments that emerged from this endeavor. Throughout, I consider how embodied and performative pedagogy makes space for multiple ways of knowing and meaning-making within a performative frame.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

After the final workshop I returned to Central High and interviewed five of the twenty-four students (those who had parental consent, gave youth consent, and who were present for at least five out of the nine workshops) about their experiences during the residency. These interviews took place in the student break room, lasted no more than fifteen minutes, and ended with a "watercolor conversation"[9] between the youth participants and myself. To prepare for the interviews, I compared my reflective journal entries with transcriptions from the nine workshops. The data was read thoroughly and repeatedly to get a sense of substantive codes, or larger themes through a thematic analysis process. Johnny Saldaña says of thematic analysis, "Unlike content analysis, which begins with predefined categories, thematic analysis allows categories to emerge from the data" (*The Coding Manual* 140). The substantive codes that arose informed my final interview questions. I created an interview guide and built the discussion around my key research questions, hypotheses, and emerging topics I identified to be critical to my understanding of the project. These topics were:

1. Engagement/Interaction: *What do participants remember most? What was the participant's experience? How did they engage/interact with the work? How would they define engagement?*
2. Aesthetics: *What aesthetic tools/skills did participants practice? Did they consider what we did as art?*
3. Assessment: *What did we do? How might they describe the workshop to someone else?*
4. Ethics: *Where was their understanding? Confusion? What questions did they have about the project/research/me?*

[9] Watercolor conversations are a non-verbal conversation through the use of colors, lines and shapes. The conversations between workshop participants and myself can be found in Appendix B. [Source: Beth Link]

During our conversation, youth participants referenced specific moments within the workshops in response to my question about what they best remembered. Curious about the relationship between these youth identified moments, my practice, and addiction recovery programs for youth, I returned to my reflective practitioner field notes and examined these youth identified moments through a recovery lens. Recovery is generally viewed as a personal journey rather than a set outcome, and one that may involve identifying personal obstacles, developing supportive relationships, and meaning. As I examined the youth identified moments in our collective artist journey, I came to see a pattern that I identified as—performative moments within the journey of recovery. This pattern was represented through the recurring themes of (a) creating new pathways, (b) disrupting lines of separation, and (c) agents in the creation of their own well-being. In the next section, I will focus my reporting for this thesis on three specific performative moments, two in Workshop 4, and one in Workshop 9. In the following youth selected "memorable" performative moments, I will consider how multimodal semiotic symbol systems and meaning-making of embodied performance connected/supported student identified moments of recovery.

PERFORMATIVE MOMENT ONE: CREATING NEW PATHWAYS

In Workshop 4, I facilitated an activity called "Obstacles." The instructions for the opening strategy was for the group to safely guide a blindfolded traveler across a maze of obstacles (see: "Minefield" Michael Rohd's *Theatre for Community, Conflict,*

and Dialogue). We played for several rounds, each obstacle course growing more and more complex as reflected in my fieldnotes:

> The youth artists constructed the most elaborate, intricate, and dangerous-looking obstacle courses I've ever seen. It was inspiring to watch them so bravely move through the unknown. I observed ones who have been subdued, laugh and cheer and sit riveted — witness to the obstacles their peers crossed to reach their goal. (Fieldnotes, 2 Oct. 2018)

We heard feedback from each traveler after they navigated the obstacle course. The first traveler relayed that is was difficult for him because there were so many people talking at once; "it was absolute chaos" (Fieldnotes, 2 Oct. 2018) he said with a smile. We reflected on the action and considered ways we might improve our communication for the next round. I wondered aloud*: What strategies could we use to help the traveler successfully cross the course?* The artists did not like my suggestion of going around the circle, giving feedback one at a time. They did, however, find a way to guide the travelers safely to their destination. One such strategy was exemplified by a participant I will call "the guide." The performative moment shown in Figure 2 is an example of attentive and responsive peer support in action. In the moment below, "the guide" side-coaches "the traveler" through a series of obstacles.

> THE GUIDE: Ok, you are going to need a big step right here.
> THE TRAVELER: Uhh … *(she isn't so sure about this idea)*
> THE GUIDE: You can do it … I believe in you.
> THE TRAVELER: (*Takes a big step over the yarn. A moment of distrust. Realizing there is nothing there, touches down*). Ahh!

Figure 2: The Obstacle Course

The entire room erupted into cheers. In Figure 2 we see "the traveler," arms extended wide, bravely navigating varying levels of yarn and paper. Once the traveler successfully moved through the course, again, the room erupted into cheers and laughter. Afterwards, I asked the traveler what her experience was like. She said:

> THE TRAVELER: I was scared. But I listened to other people that I knew wanted me to be successful, so that helped.
> KATE: I saw a lot of trust.
> THE TRAVELER: *(smiling*) It was confusing. It was hard.

We reflected on the action and participants connected this experience to their real lives by sharing pieces of advice that have been helpful for them when navigating personal obstacles such as: "Be yourself. Accept that you are enough"; "Life is not a straight path, it does curve. You may hit an obstacle sometimes but you got to find your way past"; and "Even if you trip, (that is relapse), keep going!" One participant in the group offered, "It reminded me of one time, I was chilling in rehab and it kinda occurred to me that I needed to ask for help more … once I did, then things really started to look up."

(Fieldnotes, 2 Oct. 2018) Others nodded their heads as if they too had struggled with asking for help and then came to an understanding that they could. In one of post workshop interviews, I asked the "guide" to reflect on this specific moment. He speaks of the experience:

> When I saw that she (the traveler) was stuck and confused, I knew that it was because too many people were talking at the same time. If I could tell her what I saw in a clear way, she could do it. (Participant interview, 6 Dec. 2018)

Research suggests the importance of peer support in a young person's recovery journey. Specifically, others who have experienced similar challenges, who may be on a journey of recovery themselves, can be helpful allies. Placed in a situation where they had to support their peers navigate the course, the youth participants made visible the "sharing of experiential knowledge, skills, and social learning," which recovery-oriented literature suggests is "fundamental to building resiliency and recovery" ("Designing*"* 19). Placed in the drama, the youth participants were able to articulate real-world issues mirrored in the obstacle course. It is possible then that the drama served as a physical and metaphorical pathway for youth participants to work with constructing and deconstructing obstacles in their path to recovery— through a mediated and embodied moment. As the traveler navigated the course, she made visible the creation and commitment to new pathways. As the traveler reflected on her own experiences as it related to the drama, she exhibited a tremendous amount of trust despite her expressions of fear. This indicates to me the performative possibility of what Dr. Megan Alrutz calls "transgressive transportation." Invoking change theories of "transportation" and "transgression" defined by bell hooks as "...a movement against and beyond boundaries"

(*Teaching* 12), Alrutz poses a possibility of "transgressive transportation" she defines as "critically engaged, aesthetic experiences that create conditions for imagining, exploring, and creating new places, images, ideas, and possibilities" (89). Through a moment of "transportation" the traveler and the guide, practiced persistence and dialogical exchange — literally moving towards new pathways and new possibilities. If I consider this moment within the context of performative pedagogical lens, the youth participants shifted from what Pineau says is a "body on display" to the "systematic exploration through enactment of real and imagined experience" (50). In other words, in/through this performative moment youth participants reflected on *how* and *why* their bodies behaved in habitual patterns and they considered these choices in relationship to their particular lived experiences.

PERFORMATIVE MOMENT TWO: DISRUPTING LINES OF SEPARATION

As described in the Performative Moment One, participants identified a number of interlocking obstacles they face as young people in recovery including a lack of a sense of belonging due in part to a tendency to "not ask for help" and "feelings of isolation" (Fieldnotes, 2 Oct. 2018). Scholarship in youth recovery models suggests that substance use disorders is associated with high levels of social isolation. In the article "Addiction and the Importance of Social Connection" published by the National Institute on Drug Abuse for Teens, the authors maintain, "For people with substance use disorders, connecting in a meaningful way with other people—including others who are recovering from the same disorders—seems to help limit the urge to use drugs" (web). Critical to

counter isolationism is social connectedness through community and peer support which can foster a sense of belonging, accountability, and meaning. Following the obstacle course activity, young artists devised interactive art installations that offered the ability to co-design, build, and explore physical and metaphorical obstacles they faced. We brainstormed some ideas as a group. In pairs, the youth participants built a sculpture using metaphor as a primary concept to make structural comparisons between aesthetic concepts and personal and interpersonal experiences**.** I found in our process that the use of metaphor, or language that "swerves from 'ordinary' usage… [that] treats something as something else" (Culler 67-68), was a helpful point of entry into creating and reflecting on our work. Metaphor gives participants enough distance from the actual object they are metaphorizing. As philosopher and semiotician Mikhail Bakhtin asserts, "In order to understand, is it immensely important to be located *outside* the object of his or her creative understanding in time, in space, in culture" (7). In my choice to build physical installations with the participants, my intention was to explore the physicalizing of obstacles, many of which participants expressed were "only in their heads" (Fieldnotes, 2 Oct. 2018). This idea of bringing the "inside out," so to speak, is a powerful way to work with hindrances. As participants designed and constructed their structures, I asked them to reflect upon and discuss how their installations might relate to ways we control space in relationships.

An image of Performative Moment Two can be seen in Figure 3. Here, we see an example of participants constructing an installation of a web by combining, positioning, and relating objects and bodies to different levels and space. One participant stands

confidently in the middle of the "Web of Addiction," hands on his hips. Another participant, kneeling, is scribing and taping words of encouragement and support onto the web—including "I believe in you" and "You are worth it." (Fieldnotes, 2 Oct. 2018). As the participant tapes the word, the participant in the middle rips away a piece of the web. During one moment, the scribe hands the participant "caught" in the web a pen and paper. She nods and says, "Now it's your turn." (Fieldnotes, 2 Oct. 2018). Initially, it was unclear to me what was meant by this exchange of pen and paper. In a reflection on the experience, the participant in the web shared that he interpreted this moment as an invitation to write messages of encouragement to/for himself. I was incredibly moved by this moment. The youth participants were making care visible and scribing motivating messages to overcome the obstacles they faced and literally tearing away the barriers that kept them trapped within the web. The exchange *between* participants in this moment was a great source of inspiration as I was moved to imagine the possibility of the artists extending their horizons along with community and peer-to-peer support beyond the world of theatre making. These "intimate negotiations," as Thompson notes, "are the aesthetics of the project" (*Towards* 474) and suggest to me the possibilities that emerge through multimodal meaning-making within applied drama/theatre performance to make space to imagine new futures and create new maps of meaning.

Figure 3: The Web of Addiction

In a final interview I asked a participant about this specific moment. He shared:

> I liked that day. You know it is nice having the opportunity to share with someone, and you know just get it off my chest. I was a very isolated person. I'd just shut people off … close down. Now I've remembered that I actually like hanging out with people. Hearing about them brings me out of myself instead of just being stuck in my own head and how I am envisioning, how I view other people. You know, I want to know more about other people so that I can change my view about them. (Participant interview, 6 Dec. 2018)

This young artist expresses a shift in his conceptualizations of Self and evolution of beliefs and values in relation to his community through this performative moment. This suggests to me that the young artists were more involved in disrupting the lines of separation and moving towards greater understanding of themselves and their community than perhaps I originally realized throughout our process. By working *in* images and *through* the body, vocabulary could be invented *through* multiple semiotic sign systems which may otherwise have been consciously unavailable to the participants, and to me as the facilitator. The mediated moments of multimodal dialogical and embodied

engagement in drama-based approaches to teaching and learning offer possibilities for participants to affect how they name the world.

Through active and dramatic engagement, Kathryn Dawson and Bridget Lee argue, "participants actively work as an ensemble to imagine new possibilities and to embody and to make meaning as a way to situate understanding within the larger narrative/story of the human condition" (18). As youth participants worked together to make meaning of their own lives, they were also expressing caring moments which work to counter a neoliberal society that holds the false dichotomy "us-against-them coupled with you-are-on-your-own'" isolationism (Sennett qtd. in *Towards* Thompson 280**)**. Thompson suggests these exchanges between participants in an art-making process are "powerful counterweights to the exclusions and disregard in a careless society" (439). He maintains:

> the shape and feel of the relationships at the heart of the project are its aesthetics … demonstrated in the astonishing sense of connection between different people involved in making art together … to cultivate the understanding that regard for others is central to making the world a better place (*Towards* 439).

It has long been recognized that drama and theatre are well situated to foster empathy and care through multiple perspective taking and dialogic meaning-making. It is understood the territory of applied drama/theatre and participatory, community-based performance aims to foster values of care and interconnectedness. Community-based artist Jan Cohen-Cruz writes, "art's maximum value at the community level involves the relationships it supports and develops" (159). At its core, a recovery-oriented care model works to uncover isolation and cultivate a sense of interdependence and collective

responsibility to others in the community ("Designing"). This subverts individualism, isolation characteristic of addiction, and cultivates community support — an indicating factor for facilitating and supporting recovery (White and Godley). Dr. Megan Alrutz reminds us that "it is in these moments of relation and negotiation, however small or temporary, that we create the conditions for belonging" (107). In Performative Moment 2, conditions for belonging appeared to be forged, however momentary.

PERFORMATIVE MOMENT THREE: AGENTS IN THE CREATION OF THEIR WELL-BEING

In December, I returned to Central High for our final workshop— bag of snacks and rolled up canvas labyrinth in hand. As discussed in the prior section even though the public experiential event was cancelled, it was important to me that the young artists had an opportunity to experience the event they had designed. During my post-program interviews with the youth participants, I asked the youth artists about their aesthetic choice to feature two rather quiet and introspective activities (the guided meditation and walking labyrinth) in the original performance sharing. One participant reflected, "We wanted a space to get all our stress out … and to create a relaxing feel that is not so energized, but you are still there and present." Another shared, "We wanted to do something to calm ourselves down and let go of anxieties and such." Yet another walked me through her memory of the experience:

> It was kind of a solitary experience in community. We physically walked the labyrinth and as we did it, we tried to place things inside that we wanted to leave behind and as we walked out, we thought about things we wanted to take forward with us. We found comfort in the group and decided for ourselves what we could take away as individuals.

I was interested in her choice of the word "we." I pressed a little further and asked her to speak from the first person, using "I" statements. I wondered: *What does engagement look like? Was she just telling me what she thought I wanted to hear?* She took a deep breath and said, "It was challenging when not everyone participated and didn't take things seriously. I had a good experience because I think you get out of things what you put into them." I asked if she remembered what she left behind and what she wanted to take forward that day. To this she replied, "stress" and "to find that inner peace with everything" (Interview, 6 Dec. 2018). Naming her experience was an act in moving towards creating a space she wished to inhabit. Theatre artist and clinical psychologist Ted Rubenstein offers that:

> Naming is a process of knowing and of agency. Once we put a name to something, we can begin to understand it and exert some agency, if not control, over it [...] Once we begin to name things, we have some power to affect them. (176)

If I consider the youth artists' choice to create a space that foregrounded their needs, impulses and desires for "calm" and "relaxation," I am moved to believe that the work was a symbolic and expressive act towards their own individual and collective well-being. The participant's reflection support scholarship in youth recovery models that suggests "recovery must be self-directed…" where individuals take "responsibility for their own self-care and journeys of recovery" ("Designing" 18). The youth participant expressed a sense of taking responsibility for her own well-being, and while it may be unobservable to me, her part can be very valuable to her peers; by showing up for

ourselves we begin to create space for others to do the same. Power in this moment constitutes the youth participant's sense of embodiment and also their agency.

CONCLUSION

Although a number of themes were identified, for this paper I focused on three performative moments within the workshops that embodied a journey of recovery, exemplified by "new ways of seeing and knowing." My personal reflections were often contradicted by what participants said was their experience in the project. Reflections in post-program interviews indicate that something significant had occurred. There was joy, meaning-making, and connections made to their own lives. There was a deep interest in understanding the stories of others and communicating to me the significance of their experience. This suggests to me the complexity of applied drama/theatre projects and the relationships we develop within them; there are so many interlocking factors that contribute to layers of meaning to be understood.

I started this project interested in what could be learned through devising theatre with young people in a recovery context. From my experience talking with the youth participants in the project, I came to see the result of our efforts was not one singular sharing rather, a series of embodied moments that enacted "a new kind of virtuosity," one that, as Thompson suggests, "does not rely on the singular display of self-honed skill" but rather locates its aesthetic value "in-between people in moments of collaborative creation, conjoined effort and intimate exchange" (*Towards* 438). From this exchange I am inspired to think of the possibility for reciprocity, for new ways of seeing/knowing to

emerge, for lines of separation to be crossed (with consent), and for spaces of possibilities guided by attentiveness and love to take root and grow. As I look towards the future, and aim towards an aesthetic of caring *with* young people and communities I am inspired by feminist scholars Dutt and Kohfeldt words, "care and justice are inherently interconnected, and only through their united focus can we begin to adequately create more healthful, equitable, and compassionate societies" (578). While questions still remain as to the possibilities and challenges of assessing impact and efficacy of applied drama/theatre programs, the understanding that has emerged from this is a momentary exchange of care and hope that cannot be measured in value, ownership, or by any other qualitative means.

Chapter Four

> The journey is the work, the work is the journey.
>
> — Tananarive Due[10]

In this reflective practitioner research paper, I reflected on my practice-based research asking these central questions: *What is the experience of youth participants in an applied drama and theatre project? How does/could an applied drama/theatre process integrate individual and/or collective meaning-making in and through the body?* I began this applied drama/theatre project interested in exploring a process of embodied performance (drama-based work) with youth participants at a recovery high school. In light of the literature on addiction and recovery from addiction, I was curious in the parallels that could be made between embodied performativity, multimodal meaning-making, and recovery-oriented care models. I planned the applied drama/theatre project and structured it in such a way that would allow many participants to enter into a process of creating art and reflecting on our work together. Over the course of nine workshop hours, the youth participants in this study created and interpreted texts (broadly defined) based on themes related to recovery and co-designed an event for their public community. While the public event never happened, I did return to the school to co-lead an internal event with the youth participants. Through the process of engaging in a practice-based research, I also came to understand that my own journey was part of my understanding of the whole experience and asked: *What can be learned by engaging with a reflective practice in an applied drama/theatre project?* The objective of this paper has

[10] [qtd. in brown 199]

been to explore a dual set of journeys and to suggest that teaching and learning—and recovery—is an ongoing, continuously unfolding journey of 'becoming.' In this, my final chapter, I summarize my findings and look at the limitations of the study, which include the number of participant interviews and other research and practice variabilities. I follow this with recommendations for the field and closing thoughts.

FINDINGS

By engaging with a reflective research practitioner methodology, I aimed to better understand myself and in doing so, grow as a practitioner, and ultimately, move towards creating and contributing to systems that I value—more inclusive and supportive creative spaces for young people to dream, imagine, and make positive decisions in their own lives. I now realize that I needed my own agentic space as a reflexive practitioner so that I could do the work of seeing my practice as making space and place for meaning-making.

When I look over the findings of this thesis study, two conclusions emerge. One, navigating complex terrain, cultivating relational practices, and developing a rich inner life is essential to the world we live in. A reflective practitioner research methodology can support this work. As I aim to reduce the risk of practicing and researching in ways that reinforce constructs in the name of proving evidence of product or outcome, I am forced to consider the limiting constructs I myself reinforced in the process of creating, facilitating, and researching an applied drama/theatre project with youth participants. I found, through an ongoing reflection of my own journey alongside that of the youth

participants, that I need to continue to work to counter false constructs and my perceptions. I recognize that I need to balance my ideas and expectations with the needs of the participants. I also need time to work with community-partners to build a shared understanding and necessary structure to meet our collective project goals. A step towards making these changes in practice includes valuing myself as a stakeholder in the process. I need to ask for what I need; I need to voice and value my own expertise. The tensions I experienced around power-sharing and ownership in this project led me to interrogate my own assumptions about building spaces and places for youth agency. While I modeled attentiveness and responsiveness throughout the development and implementation in the project, I assumed that I had not prepared the youth participants to step into the role of agentic artists by equipping them with the performance tools and continuity of process I supposed they needed to feel competent and confident. With some distance from the project, I see how I came into this project with certain notions about quality which were tied to my ego. I equated the quality of my effectiveness as a facilitator to the quality, outcome, and product of the project. Throughout this research, I had to trouble my notions of quality. Ultimately, this included embracing one-off interactions with youth participants as critical and valuable moments of exchange and meaning-making.

A second finding of this study suggests that embodied performance (drama-based work) and multimodal meaning-making can illuminate sign systems which may otherwise be hidden. For youth in recovery—as for myself, as for society—a reclamation of the social and physical body is not only our challenge, it is imperative to our future.

Through body and symbols, the youth participants in this project moved towards what psychologists Mary Watkins and Helene Shulman call "possibilities and solidarities within their community." The authors maintain, "because many resources will not have been spoken fully, the best access is often through image-making in the arts; a process that allows first for the creation of meaningful symbols and then for dialogues of interpretation" (233). Placed in the drama, the youth participants were able to articulate real-world issues and make choices in stepping forward, stepping back, and actively contributing to a future they wish to inhabit. Whereas addiction gives few choices, the youth participants had choice within a structured, creative process in how they expressed themselves, whether it was verbally, non-verbally, or through art objects which provides a sense of agency in how they name the world.

Throughout this applied drama/theatre project, I observed participants move from positions of being subdued to active verbal and non-verbal engagement through collaborative and multimodal devising processes. I observed, at times, a quality of absorption— or becoming deeply immersed in the work together. This leads me to believe that making art and collectively reflecting on our work in multimodal ways, creates possibility for youth agency, conditions for belonging, and social connectedness. These outcomes support the aims of recovery-oriented care guidelines for young people in recovery. As theatre maker Augusto Boal suggests, the development of new perceptions through the creation of embodied symbols can open up dialogue for interpretation, multiple narratives, and a de-mechanizing of the human body. These

perceptions, in turn, stimulate an individual's reflection on their reality, agency, and knowledge of self and the world.

Finally, with some distance, I came to see the youth-led event as an act towards caring for and *with* one another, and the creation of a space where qualities of "acceptance and patience," "creativity," and "love" could be realized. I am left further convinced of the need for opportunities for young people to create art together. The value of creative activity, through giving form to emotions and ideas, can foster individual and collective power. I wonder: could we develop an aesthetic that favors work in which relational practice employs moments of caring *with* young people? What would this look like? How might applied drama/theatre practitioners describe, analyze, reflect upon, and assess projects that value care and justice as part of the process *and* product? Could care—the quality of exchange between individuals and material—create the basis for an artistic practice?

LIMITATIONS

This study is limited to the twenty-four young people in recovery I worked for a total of nine hours, over the course of four months, at a recovery high school in Texas. Nineteen of the twenty-four students were white and male-identifying. Three of the twenty-four were present for all nine hours. Post-program interviews were conducted with five participants including, three white cisgender men and two white cisgender females. The racial and gender breakdown of the youth participants were: nineteen (white), two (Black), two (Hispanic); nineteen (male-identifying), and five (female-

identifying). While this paper is neither a critique on Central High nor is this study's aim to specifically address racial injustice and access to recovery programs, it is important to name the site of my research and situate it within a larger social and political context. Reflective of the demographic breakdown of my research site, the origins of recovery high schools in the United States are a reflection of our nation's history of racial injustice. Recovery high schools began emerging in the United States during Ronald Regan's war on drugs. It is not possible to talk about drugs in the United States without talking about mass incarceration and the devastating effects of rhetoric and drug policies on communities of color. While the domestic war on drugs, disproportionately targeted and continues to target Black and Brown communities, recovery high schools were established as continuing sources of care for what was and continues to be predominately white youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognizing the complexity of recovery high schools and the multidimensional nature of addiction and recovery from addiction, building connection within the community to effectively build ethical (and culturally specific) programming is critical to building sustainable applied drama/theatre programs. Because turnover is a normal part of recovery high schools and communities in recovery, considerable care and attention to the design and implementation of an applied drama/theatre project is imperative to building project momentum, community buy-in, and considering multiple points of access for youth participants to enter into, and gracefully exit, the art-making process.

Adult stakeholders and other community gatekeepers can help build group rapport and assist the practitioner with the understanding of specific individual and community needs and help develop relevance across educational, recovery, and community contexts.

Lastly, I advocate for a pedagogical turn towards performative and embodied practices as a part of a care-oriented recovery models for young people. Research shows the arts improve overall mental and physical health while improving brain function and cognition. Despite the fact that the arts play an important role in health and wellbeing, the development and implementation of art programs have yet to become a stable standard in recovery high schools. Building caring and creative spaces for youth to affect how they name the world is part of a holistic approach to recovery from addiction.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

In an Op-ed published in the *Los Angeles Times*, Tenzin Gyatso the 14th Dalai Lama makes a wish. The Tibetan spiritual leader writes, "my wish is that, one day, formal education will pay attention to the education of the heart, teaching love, compassion, justice, forgiveness, mindfulness, tolerance, and peace." Our educational systems, he urges, must teach our younger generation "the idea that dialogue, not violence, is the best and most practical way to solve conflicts" and that empathy, cooperation, and caring for others is the way forward in these times of divisiveness and separation (web). I believe embodied performative pedagogy can support this call by creating conditions for belonging and possibilities for young people to affect how they name the world. Dialogic and multimodal meaning-making through an embodied

pedagogy, like drama and theatre, provocatively invites a relationship between the *quality* of interactions and relations to/with other bodies. Furthermore, an embodied pedagogy invites critical engagement with our own inner lives that inform the making of outer lives, and thus, inform the shaping of our societies.

Through the process of making and unmaking this paper and examining my gestures and narratives alongside the youth participants, I realized how much of the change work needed to happen, first, within myself. This experience challenged me to invite in others to help make and share meaning. I see my own process of moving through this work and out again akin to the labyrinth, a reoccurring motif in this applied drama/theatre project. The labyrinth is both circular and linear, simple and complex, historical and temporal, iterative and nonlinear. From within, the view is extremely restricted and confusing, while from above there is a supreme artistry and beauty (Doobs 1-8). I remain curious about the many complex ways that I choose to making meaning of my own experience and how I support others in the meaning-making of their own. In "Storytelling and the Threads of Meaning" teaching artist and co-founder of the Moth Education Program Dr. Micaela Biel asserts, "as so much art begins with a personal story—and creates space for participants to interrogate their own lives and experiences to create meaningful art—a teaching artist must play a vital role in facilitating this journey" (81). I could not agree more. I was reminded of my north star and the power of the arts (and artists) to envision change, reveal truths, and influence thought. I have come to understand the incredible privilege it is to be a teaching artist, researcher, adult ally, and human being clearing the rubble out of her own path. In doing so, my deep hope is to

make clear and easier the path of others. So, now I walk on, and continue to trust the journey, one day at a time.

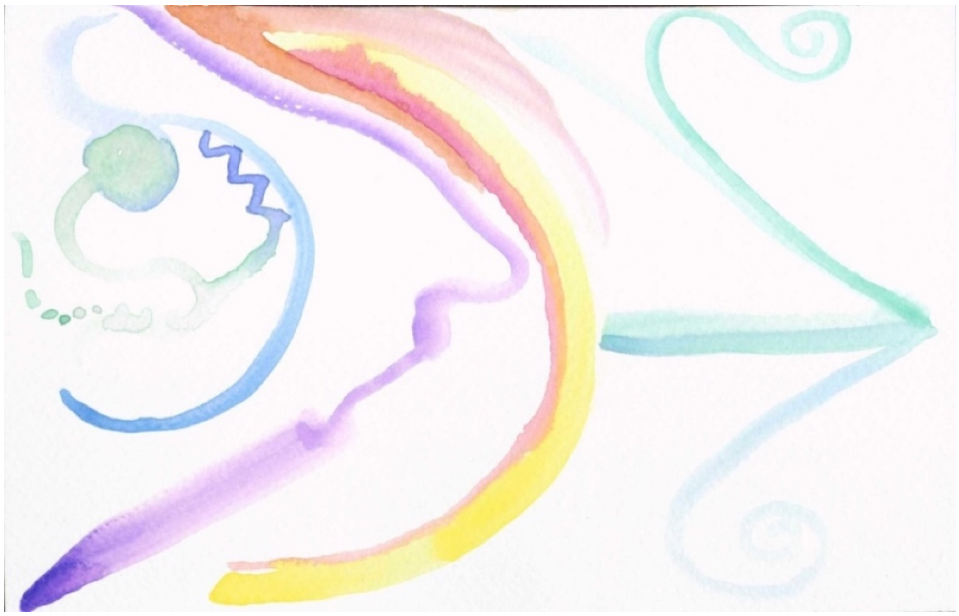
Appendix A: Residency overview

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Getting to know one another</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Day 1 – Tuesday, September 4
60 minutes
Learning Objectives
To learn about the group and find commonalities; engage some degree of empathy between group members.
Recovery-oriented principle: Peer support and community</td></tr>
<tr><td>Warmup</td><td>Mental: Weather report
Physical: Name and gesture</td></tr>
<tr><td>Engage</td><td>Shoes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Explore</td><td>The story of my name</td></tr>
<tr><td>Reflect</td><td>It made me think</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Day 2 – Tuesday, September 15
60 minutes
Learning Objectives
To establish group agreements; to develop ensemble and engagement in a low-risk competitive way and serve as a segue into collaborative story making.
Recovery-oriented principle: Peer support and community</td></tr>
<tr><td>Warmup</td><td>Mental: Personal superpower
Physical: Zip zap zop</td></tr>
<tr><td>Engage</td><td>Group agreements</td></tr>
<tr><td>Explore</td><td>Musical chair poetry</td></tr>
<tr><td>Reflect</td><td>It made me think</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Day 3 – Tuesday, October 2
60 minutes
Learning Objectives
To explore metaphor and mapping as modes to gather collective wisdom about navigating life in recovery; to acknowledge and name assets and expertise in the group.
Recovery-oriented principle: Peer support and community</td></tr>
<tr><td>Warmup</td><td>Mental: If you won the lottery
Physical: Circle and cross</td></tr>
<tr><td>Engage</td><td>Object as metaphor</td></tr>
<tr><td>Explore</td><td>Journey mapping with gallery walk</td></tr>
<tr><td>Reflect</td><td>It made me think</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">Developing a shared language</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Day 4 – Tuesday, October 16
60 minutes
Learning Objectives
To explore devising as one mode of story gathering and sharing; to acknowledge and name assets and expertise in the group; encourage ensemble and engagement through</td></tr>
</table>

multimodal modes of expression. *Recovery-oriented principle: Empowerment*	
Warmup	Mental: Just the ticket Physical: Transforming circle
Engage	Creative free writing
Explore	Short devising sequence
Reflect	It made me think
Day 5 – Tuesday, October 30 **60 minutes** **Learning Objectives** To understand that there are inevitable barriers that will be encountered and not to fear those potential obstacles. *Recovery-oriented principle: Resiliency*	
Warmup	Mental: One breath, one word Physical: Knots
Engage	Obstacle course
Explore	Museum of obstacles with gallery walk
Reflect	It made me think
Day 6– Friday, November 2 **60 minutes** **Learning Objectives** To understand the importance of working together as an ensemble in designing a performance event; to discover and define the elements of the event. *Recovery-oriented principle: Responsibility and accountability*	
Warmup	Mental/Physical: Fruit bowl
Engage	Poster dialogue
Explore	Recipe of the event
Reflect	Takes and leaves
Building, sharing and reflection	
Day 7 – Tuesday, November 6 **60 minutes** **Learning Objectives** To develop the performance event; to engage group in multimodal ways of creating performance work. *Recovery-oriented principle: Responsibility and accountability*	
Warmup	Mental: One breath, one word Physical: Heads up
Engage	Tour of working stations, equipment, and materials
Explore	Designing the space, building a soundscape, peer-to-peer interviews
Reflect	It made me think
Day 8 – Wednesday, November 14 **60 minutes**	

Learning Objectives To gather collective wisdom about navigating paths and parts unknown. *Recovery-oriented principle: Courage and hope*	
Warmup	Mental: One breath, one word Physical: Thumbs
Engage	Story exchange
Explore	Museum of thresholds with gallery walk
Reflect	It made me think
Day 9 – Tuesday, December 4 **60 minutes** **Learning Objectives** To deliver a performance event; to reflect upon and celebrate the journey. *Recovery-oriented principle: Peer support and community*	
Engage	Guided meditation
Explore	Walking labyrinth with soundscape
Reflect	It made me think

Appendix B: Watercolor conversations



"Flow" (a conversation between GrrPa[11] and Kate)

"Reflecting Mirrors" (a conversation between AsSu and Kate)

[11] Taking a cue from Kathleen Gallagher's research working with young people experiencing what she names as "assaults on their imaginaries and their desires" (3), I have invited participants to name themselves and how they would like to be identified for the reader.

“Acid Trip” (a conversation between Tana and Kate)

“Blast” (a conversation between TaterTot and Kate)

“Volumes of Blue” (a conversation between Scootie and Kate)

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Vita

Kate Proietti is a multidisciplinary artist and facilitator interested in becoming more fully human through contemplative and collaborative artistic practices. Her work moves towards centering healing and disrupting barriers that prevent people from seeing and loving each other (and themselves). Her research interests include applied drama and theatre, embodiment as pedagogy and performance, and a feminist ethics of care. She is a big fan of labyrinths and plans to continue walking them for the rest of her life.

She holds an M.F.A. in Drama & Theatre for Youth & Communities from the University of Texas at Austin. Kate has worked with/for organizations across various fields and contexts including: Forklift Danceworks, Drama for Schools, Voices Against Violence, Creative Action, Google x, Studio B Films, The Chilean Ministry of Education, Bob Baker Marionette Theatre, The Fountain Theatre, Girl Scouts of America, and Montana Shakespeare in the Park.

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